

ABELARD, PETRARCH, THE SCALIGERS, HERDER, GIBBON.

REPRESENTATIVE MEN.

MEN OF LETTERS.

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It seems natural to suppose that Men of Letters must be, of all orders of men, the most alike from age to age—the least affected by the passage of time, or by changes of events and manners. Their occupation is the study of the thoughts of the dead, and of the same dead, for the most part. Almost the whole literature of the world (as the

world was supposed to be till lately) was known to the men of learning of every nation: for the surviving works of the ancients were not too many for the study of a single lifetime. It would seem that men of any nation and any century whose minds lived on the same books must resemble each other more closely than other Men. Under the universal law that the intellect of man determines his whole character, it might be expected that men who dwelt on the same ideas, and idolised the same modes of expression, would have the same views of life and objects of desire. Most of us have formed a conception of the character and life of a student of literature, as he must be under all circumstances, in virtue of his pursuit; and we are surprised accordingly whenever we are led to observe that Men of Letters have characteristics in one age which do not appear in another. At one time they challenge the notice of society by the utmost publicity; and at another they are heard of only by their works, and never seen. In one century they travel on behalf of learning, and in another they pass their whole lives in their libraries. In one age the scholar is necessarily a theologian; in another a philosopher; in another a poet; in another a historian. The spirit of their age works upon them in spite of all their efforts to shut themselves up with the past: and hence a variety of Representative Men is seen in a department of human life in which one might have been imagined sufficient.

For a long period the men of letters were shut up in monasteries, or made rare appearances at the courts of princes who honoured learning. Age after age the scholars of society were busy in their cells copying manuscripts, and studying and interpreting, in the character of commentators. They were not very enlightened, as they did not bring much knowledge of life to bear on books; but they have laid us under infinite obligations by preserving the literature which was to make succeeding generations wise. At the same time they created the conditions under which scholarship should first appear on the open field of life. Pre-ferment in the Church was given to the eminent among them; and, as letters were found to be the avenue to ecclesiastical greatness, it was a matter of course that the first open profession of scholarship should bring them into contact with theological topics. The best representative of this stage of literary pursuit is perhaps Abélard.

Abélard was born into a thoroughly military society. His father was a soldier, and he and his brothers were supposed to be born soldiers, like all other gentry. Abélard had the frame of a soldier for size and strength; he had the passions and aspirations of a feudal time; he was a Breton, living among neighbours who had been conquering England under Duke William: and he might probably have carved out a high fortune for himself if he had chosen to come across the Channel, and see how he could lord it over the Saxons here. But his soldierly father had got hold of some books in early life, and had found such a charm in them that he wished his sons to have the same advantage, and he put book-lessons before drill in their education. Abélard liked the book-lessons

best; and, though he was the eldest son, his father was not at all sorry for the preference. He allowed his eldest-born to lay aside the sword altogether, and devote himself to intellectual combat only. It is characteristic of the time, that both father and son took scholarship to mean fitness for public argumentation. Abélard travelled from province to province of France, hearing what lecturers (who were all disputants) had to say, and practising himself in answering them. They all talked out of Aristotle—or out of the little that was then known of Aristotle—mixed up with notions which would have surprised the ghost of Aristotle very much. He learned at Paris as much as could be conveyed in this way; and when he had made enemies of his master and his fellow students by (as he says) getting the better of them in argument, he proposed to open a school of instruction to youths, while he was himself very young. Stimulated by opposition, he made prodigious efforts in study and teaching, venturing to settle in the neighbourhood of Paris, and drawing away students from his old master till he made himself so ill that he had to return to Brittany to recruit his health. His reputation survived his disappearance, and his pupils longed for him back to pursue their dialectical exercises. His own narrative of the hostile action which was always going on between his old teacher and himself, and between the pupils of each, is very curious. It shows why scholars kept out of the convent or went into it, what was considered orthodox and what heretical in speech, and what was religious and what worldly in conduct. The sum of it is, that during the youth of Abélard, while metaphysical controversies occupied him, he was determining the course of men's minds in the direction of free inquiry on topics which must in time bring theological speculation after them. The instinct of the Church was already awake to the consequences of the disputes of the Nominalists and Realists: and an ecclesiastical antipathy to Abélard was a matter of course. A young man of imposing countenance, all on fire with ambition and gratified self-love, followed by homage wherever he went, and so roused by his own celebrity as to be invincible in argument, he was a sore plague to a Church which wanted to have things go quietly. Nobody could get the better of him in dispute; nobody could rival him as a lecturer; no scholar could find a gap in his learning; and no man living had witnessed such a fame as that of Abélard at the close of the eleventh century. His position was, however, very difficult to hold. He issued a work, which he called "Yes and No," which astonished all the intellectual world by its exhibition of learning. In it he brought together all testimonies of Scripture and the Fathers, together with Aristotle (as far as then known), and some of the best of the classics on all the greatest problems of human life and knowledge, showing where these authorities contradicted each other, and leaving the questions unsolved. He might solve some of them afterwards; but his object then was to show how difficult it is,—not only to decide in such cases, but to make out what authority decides. Dogmatic teachers could not like this; and it was

necessary to their influence to overthrow that of Abélard. He gave them abundant opportunity; for he was not a man who won high esteem or warm friendship. He was a heartless egotist, and of passions so strong as to render it an easy matter to disgrace him. His admiring scholars were doomed to become ashamed of their idol. The manners of the age were not strict; but it was a scandal to see the great dialectician of the age become famous by his love-songs; and when strangers from every country in Europe crowded in to hear their master, it was mortifying that he should be dull, cold, and careless. The strangers stared at each other in amazement; and the disciples slunk away, sorrowful and angry. He was absorbed by his connection with Héloïse; and his enemies wrought up the exasperation of her relatives to a fatal pitch. He was soon glad to take refuge from public observation in the cloister.

He was not made for convent life; for, with all his power of study, he could not pursue it for its own sake only. If he could have done it, it would have been now, when he was hopelessly separated from Héloïse, and disgraced in society; but celebrity had become a necessary of intellectual life to him; and he was wretched among the monks of St. Denis, who did not conceal their contempt of him as a monk, while they longed to hear him as a lecturer. He was snubbed whenever he rebuked the licence of the establishment; and it was a relief to all parties when it was proposed that, as he could not teach for hire as a monk, he should remove to one of the outlying cells of the monastery, and there teach as many as would come to hear him.

Once more his hearers were more than could be lodged, or even fed, in one neighbourhood; and he resumed not only his studies, but the pleasure of them. He composed a treatise on the Trinity, to the great satisfaction of his enemies, who wanted something to lay hold of. We see him next before an ecclesiastical council, unsustained in spirit by the certainty that he had not published any heresy, and that he had been carefully deferential to the authority of the Church. He had not self-respect enough to derive support from the consciousness that he and his book were blameless; and censure and contempt subdued him utterly. He was compelled to throw a copy of his work into the fire on the spot; and he felt yet more the insult of being made to wait for a copy of the Athanasian Creed being fetched for him to read, as if he had not known it by heart. He says he read it as he could get the words out through his sobs and choking tears. His followers must again have been ashamed of him. His enemies had gone too far, however; the Pope's legate expressed his opinion of "the excessive malignity of the French;" and Abélard returned to his cell and his teaching.

It would not do. The elder monks and he hated and teased each other, till, in mutual dread, they respectively appealed to the king, who advised them to part. Abélard was ready enough to go; but the monastery was unwilling to lose a man of such reputation, who attracted so many visitors, and conferred so much honour.

This fact opens an interesting glimpse into the life of the time. Royal advice, however, prevailed; and Abélard was allowed to depart, on condition that he should not enter any other monastery, or into society.

Here another view of the scholastic life of that age is presented. Somebody gave Abélard a bit of bare ground in the territory of Troyes; and on that bit of ground he and one "clerk" sat down. They gathered osiers, and wove them into walls for a hut: and they made a thatch for it. Some little bird told the young men of all France where Abélard was; and they came trooping to his hut. They would manage to live, if only he would lecture; and young nobles and knights, from palaces and castles, set to work to make osier huts, and collected moss and straw for their beds, and raised turf-heaps for tables, and gathered wild herbs to eat with their coarse bread. As Abélard was destitute, they tilled his bit of ground for him, and provided him with food and clothes. As his hut would not contain many hearers, they pulled it down, and built a large dwelling of stone and timber. He had dedicated the first abode to the Trinity: but now, he was so cheered by the human faces about him, and by the aid of human hands, that he gave to his new dwelling the name of the Paraclete,—the Comforter. In this throng of young hermits, as he called them, going out into desert places for the sake of learning, we see a very distinct and remarkable phase of society; and we cannot wonder at the vanity and egotism of the professors of learning in an age when the claims of wisdom were acknowledged in this style.

St. Bernard now comes upon the scene. He and other champions of the Church and its discipline denounced Abélard, with all the advantage that a whole-hearted faith and an ascetic morality gave them. He seems to have had no real courage underlying the audacity of his proud youth; and he now hid himself in a convent in Brittany, where he sank into despondency under the disgust caused him by the rudeness and vice of the monks, the tyranny of a feudal neighbour, and regret for his folly in leaving the Paraclete. He had given that refuge to Héloïse and her nuns; and he looked with envy on their peace and content, so strongly contrasted with his own fears and troubles. It seems to be true that his life was attempted by poison, as well as incessantly threatened with violence, if he should pass the convent bounds. He spent several years there, more or less restively; but the day arrived when he must meet St. Bernard, his constant accuser, or submit to utter ruin. The occasion was a striking one.

King, princes, nobles, and ecclesiastics from all parts were met to translate the body of a saint into the church of Sens. Abélard and St. Bernard seem to have feared each other. St. Bernard dreaded his antagonist's argumentative power and his learning; and Abélard was aware of the oratorical power of his holy accuser. Very soon after St. Bernard opened his charge, Abélard rose, declared that he appealed to Rome, and left the assembly. He refused to return, when called to. Whether he was impressed by the saintly counte-

nance and bearing of Bernard, or whether he saw that his opponent was regarded as an apostle by the auditory, there is no saying: we only know that he made this retreat from the field in which he had formerly triumphed as often as he appeared, and that he set forward towards Rome. He was now past sixty, and infirm; and his enemies repaired to Rome with all speed. The Pope condemned his works, and interdicted all religious men from intercourse with him; but when Abélard was obliged to stop at the Abbey of Cluni, the Abbot implored the Pope to permit him to remain there. "Inspired by Heaven to relinquish the tumultuary scenes of scholastic disputation," here he desired to find a rest like the sparrow, and to give thanks for rest, "like the plaintive turtle." The sentence was withdrawn; and Abélard spent two more years in that monastery, before the monks rendered him the last cares, and committed his body to the grave. He died on the 21st of April, 1142; but his body did not lie long in that grave. The abbot himself stole it, to give it to Héloïse, according to Abélard's own wish and promise. In the midst of a winter night, the abbot had the corpse raised, and set forth with it to the Paraclete, where he conducted the reinterment. Héloïse lived in sight of that grave till she had reached Abélard's age. Then she was buried by his side in the same stone coffin.

"The tumultuary scenes of scholastic disputation." This is not the modern view of a life of letters. The description belongs to a time when, from the scarcity of books, knowledge was obtained from lectures; when mathematics was the only science; when philosophy led inevitably to theological questions, and theological argument to "tumultuary scenes." Of such an age Abélard was the scholar in chief. It is a pity he was not something more and better: but it must be remembered in his behalf that he had no religious vocation. He would not have entered the theological field of scholarship could he have kept out of it; and we must not judge him as if he had made pretensions to a religious fortitude or purity of which it is evident that he had no conception. He had none of the repose, the general superiority of mind and temper which we associate with the idea of a life of letters; but he was not the less the representative Scholar of his period of society.

The next is perfectly represented by Petrarch. Following Abélard at an interval of two centuries and a quarter, he exhibited the same publicity of the literary character, while exemplifying the new phase of patronage of literature by the great and the rising taste for the accumulation of books. He was like his predecessors in the tendency to travel which we find it so difficult to associate with the pursuit of book-learning. His writings are chiefly treatises in Moral Philosophy—the man of letters being able, by this time, to make his choice of a wider range of topics, and to address the world on other than theological questions, varied only by the metaphysical discussions arising out of the theological forms of the time. It is true, Petrarch is popularly known chiefly by his love poetry and his love story; but his passion for Laura was only one feature of his life; and I

am speaking of him now as a man of letters. In history he stands forth as the scholar crowned at Rome for his learning and his ethical works, and as the friend of princes and statesmen, whom he influenced in the government of Europe.

Petrarch's father was a notary of Florence, banished, from political causes, and in exile when Francesco was born at Arezzo in 1304. As soon as it was evident that the family could not hope to return home, they removed to Avignon, where Pope Clement V. held his court. The boy Francesco was intended for the law, and was studying with that object at Bologna when his parents died,—one soon after the other. Much of the young student's time had been stolen from his law pursuit to be given to an idolatrous study of the classics. While the young Rienzi was wandering about Rome, meditating on the glories of the old city, and tracing the memorials of great deeds, the young Petrarch was shut up with his precious manuscripts in his college room at Bologna, translating, copying, and commenting on the historians, philosophers, and poets of Rome. They were preparing for their subsequent friendship, and each for his career.

Petrarch went to Avignon to look after his affairs, and found himself alone and poor there, while surrounded by the gaiety and licence of the court. He put on the clerical dress which every gentleman scholar then wore, and sought the society of learned men, while indulging in dissipation to a degree which he soon repented. He was two-and-twenty, handsome and accomplished; and he found so many friends that he dropped any professional projects that he might have formed. In his case we see the reasons of the practice of patronage, as it existed in that age. A book was a precious possession then, when every work was laboriously copied, and had to be carefully collated with the original before it could be trusted. Except in university libraries, and the abodes of rich and enlightened men, there was no access to books for those who could not buy; and it was as serious a matter to buy a valuable book then as to buy a good house now. It is no wonder that, in his thirst for learning, Petrarch was glad to accept the hospitality of a bishop, a cardinal, or a nobleman who offered him the opportunity of spending his days among piles of manuscripts, and of hearing intellectual subjects discussed by the most educated men of the time. We see Petrarch therefore enjoying himself as the guest of a bishop whose diocese lay at the foot of the Pyrenees, and who was fond of bringing learned men together under his roof, and of showing them whatever curious objects they could reach by mountain excursions. Petrarch celebrated the wise men he met there, and the conversations in which they spent their days. Again, we see him making one of the household of the Colonnas, and acknowledging their favours as avowed patrons. It was there that he began his study of Greek, and became marked as a scholar.

It was there, too, that he found the aspect of his life suddenly changed by the experience of an hour. He entered the church of St. Clair at Avignon, one April morning, in 1327, a philosopher, as he believed, and he left it, after service,

a lover. He had seen Laura, and this meeting broke up his plan of life. His love poetry spread over Europe, and kindled the imagination of all Europe which could read or listen to reading. Strangers struggled for a sight of Laura, or an interview with Petrarch; and the lover, in his impatience and waywardness, now broke away from Avignon, to escape from men's eyes, and now returned with an intention to settle down to his studies, and await the fulfilment of the Pope's promises of honour and employment; and then he would abscond into solitude again. The valley of Vaucluse, so well known to his readers, was a wild and beautiful place, not far from Avignon; and there he strove to forget Laura, by setting up a kind of domestic life, and devoting himself to study. But he did not love his two children, or their mother, with an affection which could destroy his passion for Laura. He did his duty towards them as well as the case admitted; but he found no peace in it. He bitterly complained of the vices of society, wherever the Papal court was, and of the Pope's delay in fulfilling his promises; and he gave these disgusts as his reason for retiring to the Vaucluse: but he could not remain there much longer than anywhere else. We find him travelling in almost every country on the continent, besides exploring every part of Italy; and his travels were not without object. He fulfilled his function of Man of Letters wherever he went. In France, Germany, and Spain, he hunted up every MS. he could get scent of, and set copyists to work to enable him to carry them home. He discovered not a few works of the great Latin authors, some of which have come down to us, while some remain only in their titles. He bought up medals, and other illustrations of antiquity; and he stimulated rich and accomplished men, wherever he went, to advance learning according to their ability. He induced a princely friend to found the University of Pavia; and he, himself, founded the library of St. Mark at Venice. He was liberal in lending his beloved classics to students, and it was in that way that several of them disappeared. While hoping that Rienzi would restore the ancient liberty in Rome, he and Boccaccio, his pupil and friend, laboured to restore throughout Italy the love of the literature of former ages.

He employed his learning in practical objects,—political as well as other. He was of great use in examining charters and diplomas, and determining which were genuine and which spurious. In that age, the honours of individuals, and the liberties of whole communities, hung on his decisions. The time was not yet gone by when eminence in letters secured employment in statesmanship; and Petrarch was sought by successive popes, kings, and reigning houses of all ranks. He was consulted about every great movement of his time; and was sent on some errands of importance; and all such opportunities of research and influence he turned to the purposes of scholarship. By 1341, his fame stood so high that the Senate at Rome invited him to come and receive the honour of the laurel crown. The laurel crown was the poet's reward: but the crowning was preceded by a three days' celebration of Petrarch's

attainments in learning. King Robert of Naples induced him to land there from Marseilles, and undergo an examination in matters of erudition. The three days were a continuous triumph, as was well foreseen; and the reigning King of Naples, and the elect King of Letters travelled together to Rome for the concluding act. It was on Easter-day, 1341, that the Capitol was crowded with spectators, and that all Rome resounded with acclamations when the leafy crown was placed upon the brows of Petrarch by a dignified member of the senate. This was seven years before the death of Laura; and such pleasure as the glorified scholar felt in the celebration was no doubt from the thought of the exaltation it would give him in her eyes. Whatever she might hear, and whatever she might think, no circumstances changed her bearing towards him, or brought him any nearer to the place he desired in her heart. When, seven years later, again on an April day, the news reached him that she had died of the plague at Avignon, he felt as if life was over for him. In his favourite MSS.,—his own beloved copy of Virgil, now in the Ambrosian Library at Milan,—he then and there wrote a kind of epitaph on his love for Laura,—an inscription familiar to all lovers of literature. The passion appeared, however, to assume a new form. He celebrated the memory of his idol; but his interest in life and its action certainly increased with years; and he was engaged in more missions, and busy in the service of more potentates within ten years of Laura's death than ever before. He was living and studying at Padua in 1362, when the plague seized the city; and Petrarch withdrew, with his library, to Venice. On his offering to bequeath his books to the Church of St. Mark, he was presented with a large house in which to establish himself and them; and from this beginning arose that great library.

When excessive study had subjected him to epilepsy, he retired to the Euganean hills, for quiet and pure air; and there he built himself the house which travellers visit when they go to Venice. His tomb, and his garden and orchard, are a goal of pilgrimage still: and the more because no other of Petrarch's many dwellings can now be pointed out. He was sixty-six when he went to Arquà; and his last years were rendered remarkable by a controversy between him and a group of opponents in regard to the merits of Aristotle,—the very subject which was disturbing society in Abélard's time. At the later period, somewhat more was known of Aristotle, and a larger proportion of society was qualified to speak of him. As a consequence, the violence of controversy was not so great, and a man as irritable and weak as Abélard need not have suffered as he did from fear. Petrarch suffered only from the danger that his reputation might be injured in Venice by the contempt of his opponents. One more work came from his hands,—or rather from those of his amanuenses,—of whom he supported six, when he could obtain so many. He suffered much from disease: but, instead of accepting medical advice, he wrote four books against physicians. He was now failing fast.

On the accession of a new Pope, and amidst his sincere grief for the departed, he intimated his wish for an easy sinecure or two, to render his last days easy,—candidly owning that he was so far from poverty that he kept three horses, and six secretaries when he could procure them. It was easier, he tells us, to procure painters than amanuenses. But he was subject to visits from crowds of admirers whenever he went to Padua, on the business of his office as canon; and he wished to be hospitable, though he preferred being alone at meals. These details disclose something of the life of the honoured Man of Letters in that day. As for himself, Petrarch wrote, near the close of his life, "I spend the greater part of the year in the country. I read; I think; I write: this is my existence, as it was in the time of my youth."

Thus it was through the decline of two years more. In his study at Arquà, he was often seen by his attendants asleep or musing, with his head resting on his book. One of them saw him in that posture, one July morning in 1374, and withdrew without disturbing him. But he was past disturbance. He had died quietly in that characteristic way.

He had his own trials, as being in some respects in advance of his time,—or, at least, of the generality of men. He was feared, and suspected, and informed against as a magician, the holder of strange books; but his career of the Scholar was one of high honour in his day; and it was the prerogative of the princes of letters to hold their course above the tumults which raged in the political world, but which had died out in the literary realm since the pursuit of letters had ceased to mean the same thing as scholastic disputation. Irritable men manage to quarrel wherever they may be: and an Abélard would probably have lived in hot water in any age; but, in the fourteenth century, society had attained the idea of a love of letters for themselves, which enabled a scholar to pursue his career without collision with other men's passions of ambition or bigotry. Still, there was inevitable publicity; and, happily, travelling was still necessary to the perfecting of the Man of Letters. Monks might remain invisible in their cells; but their names were in all men's mouths as soon as they became distinguished in literature; and, if they had not travelled, they could not attain the eminence of those who had.

Nearly two centuries later still, we find in the Scaligers a disagreeable representation of the literary character as it stood in their own conception, and in that of their neighbours of the intellectual world. The elder Scaliger, born in Verona, in or about 1484, but fond of considering himself a Frenchman, was declared to be "the miracle and glory of his age;" and De Thou himself said that the age did not furnish his equal, nor antiquity his superior. The man thus regarded in his own time was a perfect Latin scholar, with considerable, though inferior knowledge of Greek, and an idolatry of literature and of himself. We know his temper by his treatment of Erasmus in controversy. His son Joseph, his tenth child, was born in 1540, and introduces us to the literary world

of the continent in the sixteenth century. The plague having sent him home at eleven years old from college, he studied under his father, and one of his obligations was to compose an essay every day on some historical subject. Not disgusted with learning by this sharp practice, he became master of thirteen languages; and, by his own account, of all knowledge which could be obtained from books. He slept little, and at times passed days almost without food,—somewhat in the way of our Newton, with the difference that we learn Newton's feats of application from his housekeeper, and Scaliger's from himself. He declared that even the tumult in the streets during the massacre of St. Bartholomew did not, for a considerable time, force itself upon his senses,—so intent was he on his Hebrew studies. Here, however, an alibi has been proved, by avowals of his own at other times. He was at Lausanne on that day.

His vanity made him a pedant; but he had more than a pedant's powers; and Bayle declares that he had too much wit and fertility of his own to be a good critic. He was always seeing more in authors than they dreamed of, and therefore judging them by a false standard. He derived a lifelong entertainment from the study of books; and his innocent satisfactions upheld him amidst the dangerous snares of an age of patronage. He had an independent spirit which now raises him above men much more agreeable, and, in everyday life, more truthful. Joseph Scaliger preferred independent poverty to any abasement before ignorant patrons: but he was a deplorable liar when his vanity was either gratified or mortified. This exposed him to ridicule; and he replied by abuse which was very malignant; so that there is little inducement to dwell on his life and achievements. He accepted a professorship of Belles Lettres at Leyden when he was fifty-three; and this supported him in comfort for the rest of his life. He died in his 70th year, leaving the world of Europe echoing with his praises as a scholar. Heinsius shows us how far the praise of letters could go in those days. He says of Joseph Scaliger, "Men call him differently, an abyss of erudition, a sea of sciences, the sun of doctors, the divine progeny of a divine father, of the race of the gods, the greatest work and miracle, the extreme reach of Nature."

Men who could speak thus of literary pursuit, even in its highest eminence, had not learned to see that anything was greater than literature. We must remember that when the elder Scaliger lived, the accommodation of the printing-press was a new thing; and men of letters lived in the excitement of the former worship of books, together with the present delight of their general diffusion. They supposed all wisdom to be suddenly made accessible.

When books became common, the men of letters became recluses. The age of personal privacy and staying at home succeeded to the publicity and errantry, and travel in search of books of former centuries. The German scholars of the last century furnish perhaps the most complete illustration of the new state of things. Eichhorn was, I believe, not the only student in the country who never crossed his threshold for twenty years toge-

ther—who never wore a coat or boots during all that time, but passed from bed to his study-chair, and from his study-chair to bed, always in gown and slippers, and as much lost to common life as if he had been in his grave. The writings of such men came as from the grave; and those of them who chose had much of the repose of death investing their name and fame, though some of them manifested more irritability than is usually found among men of the world. Some of them had as many controversies on their hands as Abélard or the Scaligers had at the public period of their lives; but, on the whole, a prodigious amount of research was gone through for the benefit of all coming generations, and a vast wealth of erudition was stored up in privacy while the world was pursuing its business of the hour, not summoned by any exhibition of pedantry or conceit in the market-place to take sides for or against any “sun of doctors” or “extreme reach of Nature.”

Herder, born in 1744, was a fair specimen of the travelling scholar of Germany. A malady of the eyes interfered with his book studies through life, and bent his course towards observation, as he himself said. He set himself to discover a point of junction for the intellectual and spiritual pursuits of men; and he applied himself to the study of poetry and art, as well as theology and philosophy. He not only travelled literally over many of the countries of Europe, but travelled metaphorically over wide regions of oriental literature, till then unexplored. Notwithstanding his malady, he achieved a vast amount of book study, and left behind him sixty volumes, which exhibit the operation of a peculiar mind, always like itself, on a wide variety of subjects.

A contemporary of his was perhaps as good a representative of English men of letters as could be pointed out. Edward Gibbon was born in 1737, and so brought up that his love of letters must be ascribed to constitutional causes. He lived with an aunt during his childhood; and the delicacy of his health interfered perpetually with his education. He went from school to school, learning scarcely anything; and he entered college with so mere a smattering of Greek and Latin as might, he says, have made a schoolboy ashamed. Yet he had, unsuspected, “an amount of erudition which might have puzzled a doctor,” as he also tells us. He had read all the historical and geographical books he could get hold of; and he continued to read in that way, for his own pleasure, at Oxford, instead of being led by his tutors to the proper studies of the place. One effect of his historical and patristic studies was to make him first a Catholic at Oxford, and then a Calvinist at Lausanne, and finally to determine him to leave the merits of the various theological schemes to be decided on by men of a different turn of mind and pursuit to his own.

He was seven-and-twenty when he formed the design of his great work. He was able to bring to bear on his representation of Roman life a great deal of knowledge gained otherwise than from books, while he had enriched his store of erudition by a mastery of several languages. He tells us that his duty in the Hampshire militia, in a

season of military activity, helped him not a little in the exposition of the military tactics of Roman commanders. And thus it was throughout the whole course of his labour. His highest distinction, perhaps, as a Man of Letters, was his thoroughness in research, and in the preparation of his writings. He was not a man to shut himself up with books, and undertake to describe how former generations lived by taking what he pleased from books, and adding what he thought proper out of his own fancy. He grudged no time and no labour in proving the realities of things, and in ascertaining the bearings of evidence. He would go anywhere, and make any effort to obtain the smallest contribution to the materials of his history, and would put forth nothing that he had not tested by all the means at his command. It is thoroughly characteristic of him that he studied law for three years, in order to write the one chapter on Roman law required by his history.

The first volume of the “Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire” was published twelve years after he formed the scheme; and another twelve elapsed before the last volume appeared. In the interval he had gained some experience of political life by sitting in parliament for eight sessions. He did not speak; but he learned a good deal. By his support of the ministry of Lord North he obtained a place which again yielded him useful knowledge, as well as a comfortable provision, which in his case meant leisure. He was a Commissioner of Trade and Plantations; but he lost the place when Lord North went out; and then it was that he retired to Switzerland, to live with a friend of his own turn of mind and pursuits,—M. Deyverdun. He passed nearly the whole of the rest of his life at Lausanne.

The notices he has left us of both the beginning and the close of his great work indicate that imagination and sensibility were glowing within him while he was imposing the severest tasks on his understanding, his reason and his memory; and no finer combination could grace the function of the Man of Letters. By it he turned records into facts, and books into life. “As I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol,” he says, “while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind.” Such was the beginning. Who that has ever read it forgets his account of the close? He was a prudent worker usually, taking the bright and clear morning hours for intellectual labour: but at the end he was writing at night. He wrote the last word in a summer-house in his garden, at Lausanne, between eleven and twelve of a midsummer night. He laid down his pen, and went out to pace the terrace in the moonlight, under the acacias; and there he underwent emotions of mingled satisfaction and pain. His great work was achieved; but the main object and occupation of his life was gone. He was then fifty; and he lived between five and six years longer, dying in England in 1794. He had the privilege of the lovers of literature,—of being never adrift for want of interests. While there are books, Men of Letters are sure to be well entertained.

It appears that Men of Letters of our time are

carried into historical pursuit, as their predecessors of former centuries were into theology and metaphysics. Of the latest generation of Englishmen, Mr. Hallam was a very perfect specimen of the Man of Letters; and if he studied political law in history, he studied history in literature. In America there is the same tendency, as Prescott and Bancroft, and Sparks, give evidence. But there is also an Emerson, studying Man in the life, and using Man and literature together for the illustration of human life and destiny.

It is a curious speculation what the aspect of the Scholar will be when the function of books, now rapidly altering, shall have altered yet further. Books are becoming, more and more letters to those whom they concern, instead of oracles, preachments, solemn records, or pieces of finished art. When we are overwhelmed with the conception of what it may be to future students to wade in such an ocean of human thought, we must remember the benefit that it will be to posterity to be able to revive the life of the past, through the abundance of its records in every kind of pen-delineation. There will still be Men of Letters; and the time will measure out to them their proper work.

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